Missouri Botanical Garden

Parent/Caregiver Narrative

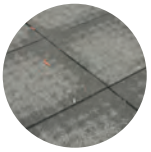
Introduction

This pre-visit tool is designed for parents and caregivers of children with ASD and other sensory concerns. Our goal is to provide you with as much information about the Children's Garden experience so your visit will be a positive and meaningful one.

The entrance to the Children's Garden is located past the Climatron. From the Ridgway Visitor Center, the 5–10 minute walk is approximately ¼ of a mile. At the entrance of the Children's Garden there is a ticket fort where you might have to wait in line to purchase or check tickets. The ticket fort at the Children's Garden entrance is a good place to set as a meeting place if you and your child get separated.

Once inside, there is a large waterfall; it can be loud and overwhelming.

There are many different paths throughout the Children's Garden with different textures that change frequently.



cushioned

rock

wood

brick

mulch

sand

Sometimes the paths will take you through darker spaces, like the covered bridge. Plants my be hanging over the pathway shading the path.

One of the main things the staff would like to emphasize is not to pick or take any of the plants. At times, a staff member may be harvesting edible plants in certain areas of the Children's Garden and will ask the children if they want to help, but this is the only time it is okay to pick plants.

Upon entering the Children's Garden, there are four different paths you can take.

They all connect together in the center of the Children's Garden.

1. Settler's Path

Nature Explore Classroom

The Settler's Path leads to the covered bridge and then to the *Nature Explore Classroom* which provides various areas to play, a wooden table with pockets filled with natural material (e.g. seed pods), a movement and music area, and a climbing area with big rocks. It also has a building area with wooden blocks and scarves, a sandbox with a standing sand table that is wheelchair accessible and raised garden beds where children can build fairy gardens and gnome homes. There is a concrete path that runs throughout the classroom, however, there are other walking surfaces as well, such as wood chips and sand.

Splash

The *Splash* area is a great place to cool off and get wet. The splash area might not be working. Staff turns the water on when the temperature is above 70 degrees. There is a bathroom located in this area if you need to change children into different clothes. There is also a gate nearby that will beep if opened by staff coming into the Children's Garden. This gate is accessed by staff badges only.

General Store

The *General Store* is a great place for pretend play with plastic food, baskets to shop, grocer's counter for checkout, kid-sized aprons, and little brooms for the kids to "keep shop." There are three to four steps up to enter at the back of the store and a level surface to enter the *General Store* around the front.

Surveyor's Office

The *Surveyor's Office* offers a path to walk through, with maps mounted on the wall. The front of the *Surveyor's Office* is a level walkway and the back has stairs with a metal handrail. During late spring and summer, the plants grow very tall and may lean over the pathway.

Town Hall

The *Town Hall* is a site for programming and birthday parties, set up with tables and chairs. There is a small puppet theater inside with plush puppets for kids to play with. This space is a cool and shady spot to relax, and when empty, it can offer a good place to be alone. The *gazebo* nearby has a set of steps on one side and low ramp on the other. It has hanging baskets throughout the season and is a good quiet spot to rest and relax in the shade.

Edible Garden

In the *Edible Garden*, staff will often be harvesting edible plants. They may encourage the children to help. Sometimes there are edible plants to taste, with adult permission. **This is the only place where children can pick plants, and *only with staff guidance.***

2. Botanist's Path

The *Tree Trunk Pavilion* and *Tree House* offer opportunities for climbing and exploring. There are many different ways to climb up.

The slide takes children to a lower level where you could lose visual contact with them, but there is a spiral staircase to the right of the slide that will take you to the bottom of the slide. There is space under the pavilion which is a dark space.

Tree House

There are a variety of ways to get to the tree house (wooden walkway, climbing wall, rope bridge, and climbing rope), where a spiral staircase takes children to the top so they can look out over the Children's Garden. There is a thick wire mesh over the window openings for everyone's safety.

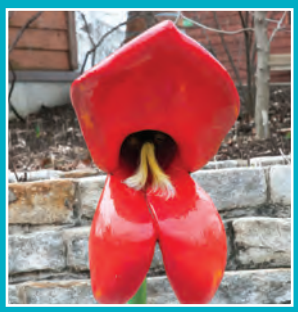
Under the wooden walkway leading to the *Tree House* is another platform that has pretend roots hanging down. These can be touched and children can hang from them.

Tree Trunk Pavilion

The *Tree Trunk Pavilion* provides a shady spot to sit and rest. There is netting around the side of the pavilion to keep fruit from the large Osage orange trees from falling onto the pathway in late August through October.

Pollination Garden

The *Pollination Garden* is a great place to explore. There are chimes in each of the large sculptural flowers that can make a lot of noise. There is also a large bee hive which can be another dark space that fits only a few kids at a time.



Secret Garden

The *Secret Garden* is another great place to explore. It has a large wooden door that looks locked but isn't. There are tall trellises all around with different vines growing up and over giving it a secluded feel. In the center there are wooden xylophone-type instruments with mallets to hit them and make deep tone sounds. The attracts lots of kids and can be a loud place.

3. Adventurer's Path

Cave

There is a *Cave* the children can move through. It is dark, cool, and has an echo when you talk or yell. On certain days each week staff and volunteers provide discovery carts offering children the opportunity to wear headbands with lights on them to go through the *Cave*. There are small cubby holes and pathways to walk through. The cave walls have a variety of different textures and there is a fossil dig pit with sand and brushes in the back. The short tunnel for kids to climb through has several steps and a low ceiling. Those who climb through should watch their heads since the ceiling is rocky and rough. There is water next to the cave with different textures to touch. There is a slide coming down on the outside with lots of steps to climb back up to the top. In the heat of summer, the plastic slide can get hot. Staff checks it regularly throughout the day and if it gets too hot, the slide may be closed for safety.

Steamboat

The *Steamboat* has a paddle wheel children can watch turning in the water from the small river.

Wetland

There is a *Wetland* area that is very secluded and quiet. This is usually the quietest spot in the Children's Garden and might be a good place to be alone.

Frontier Fort

The *Frontier Fort* is a great place for climbing. There is a spiral staircase to get to the top and overlook the Children's Garden. The windows have wire mesh over them for everyone's safety. There are other spaces below, tucked under the lower wooden staircase that may be a little dark.

4. Discoverer's Path

To enter or exit the Discoverer's Path, children can walk up or down a plank and rope bridge or an enclosed rope bridge. Both bridges move and sway when you walk on them.

Osage Camp

The *Osage Camp* is another quiet spot that has costumes the kids can wear.

Pond

There is a *Pond* where kids can watch for the occasional duck, several different types of birds, frogs, and sometimes fish.

Locks and Dams

Outside the *Cave*, there's a river of water that flows to the *Steamboat*. On the other side, you can drop a boat in the water at the *Locks and Dams*. Children can open and shut the locks and dams, observing cause and effect. Children are asked to stay on the flat stone pathway and not walk in the water.

Brookings Interpretive Center

Between the Children's Garden and the Climatron is the Brookings Interpretive Center. The center is the Garden's indoor, year-round, family-friendly destination for themed exhibits encouraging hands-on discovery, exploration, and learning. There are various areas set up for children to explore nature in multi-sensory ways. There are areas for pretend play, making craft projects, drawing, writing, and reading. It is air-conditioned and free to enter, making it a great place to cool off or get out of the rain. There are glass doorways that lead visitors to the Temperate House and the Climatron on either side. There are also bathroom facilities and a hydration station.

When leaving...

- It is always important to give your child a warning before you have to leave, for example, "We will be leaving in 15 minutes." This allows your child time to process that they will have to stop playing and leave soon.
- The exit gate is on the right side of the Ticket Fort, which is where you entered the Children's Garden.

We hope you enjoy your visit to the Missouri Botanical Gardens' Children's Garden!